

Village, Andrew ORCID:

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Psychological type and biblical interpretation among Anglican clergy in the UK

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Andrew Village¹

York St John University, York, UK

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¹ Author correspondence: York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO31 7EX, UK. Email: A.Village@yorksja.ac.uk

Psychological type and biblical interpretation among Anglican clergy in the UK

Abstract

A questionnaire measuring psychological type preferences and biblical interpretation was completed by 364 male and 354 female clergy ordained in the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom from 2004 to 2007. Preferences among the perceiving functions (sensing versus intuition) and among the judging functions (feeling versus thinking) were assessed using the Francis Psychological Type Scales. Biblical interpretation was assessed by asking respondents to read a healing story from Mark 9:14-29 and then to choose between interpretative statements designed to appeal to particular psychological type preferences. After controlling for differences in biblical conservatism, preference for interpretation was correlated with psychological function preference in both the perceiving and the judging processes. This confirms and expands a similar finding previously reported from a smaller sample of Anglican lay people.

Keywords: Anglicans, Biblical interpretation, Personality, Psychological type, Reader response

Introduction

The shift in biblical studies from the use of mainly historical-criticism to a more varied methodological approach has been marked and well documented (Anderson & Moore, 2008; Barton, 1998; Meyer, 1991; PBC, 1993; Tate, 2008; Thiselton, 1992). Along with this has come a growing interest in ‘real’ readers and what is sometimes referred to as ‘ordinary hermeneutics’ (Barton, 2002; Briggs, 1995; Cranmer & Eck, 1994; Fowler, 1985; Freund, 1987; Kitzberger, 1999; Lategan, 1996; Mesters, 1991; Svensson, 1990; Village, 2007; West & Dube, 1996). Biblical scholars are increasingly realizing that interpretation is not simply a matter of what lies within a text, but also depends on what individual readers bring to the text. The emphasis in biblical scholarship has been on the way that socially derived locations such as gender, ethnicity and economic status influence the way that biblical texts are understood and interpreted (Segovia, 1995a, b; Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, b). A glance at ‘ideological’ approaches such as feminist, liberation, post-colonial or queer biblical studies indicates that this is a discourse that remains largely within the academy. Such studies are usually based on the application of a particular conceptual framework by the interpreter, with a self-conscious recognition of their particular social location or personal experience (see, for example, the contributions in Kitzberger, 1999; Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, b).

More recently there has been a growth in the empirical study of how people in churches interpret the bible. The interest began with studies of liberation hermeneutics in South America (Mesters, 1980, 1991; Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, b) and South Africa (Sibeko & Haddad, 1997; West & Dube, 1996; West, 1991, 1994), and has more recently been developed in the northern hemisphere with empirical and ethnographic studies of readers in Europe and North America (Bielo, 2009; Village,

2005a, b, 2006, 2007). These studies have sought to examine how lay people in churches interpret the bible in relation to their particular social contexts, beliefs, attitudes or tradition. One strand of these studies has drawn on psychological type as a way understanding the ways in which individual differences may shape the way that lay people respond to biblically-based sermons or bible reading (Francis & Atkins, 2000, 2001, 2002; Francis & Village, 2008). Using the theory of psychological type, these studies have suggested ways in which preaching might be shaped to allow listeners of different psychological profiles to access biblical material in their preferred styles. Psychological type is a better model of personality to use in this regard than models such as the 'Big Five' (Costa & McCrae, 1985) because it conceptualizes psychological functioning in a way that leads to direct predictions about the way that people might interpret texts. In particular, the notion that individuals have preferences in their psychological functioning that are related to perceiving and to judging implies that they may have preferred ways of encountering and evaluating the bible. Although trait-based models of personality such as the Big Five might have some utility in predicting how people read Scripture, the theoretical links are not as clear as those implied by a model of psychological functioning that takes seriously the need for individuals to take in information from the world around them and then respond to it in some way. Although some trends in hermeneutics have tried to merge perception and judgment (arguing that all reading is intrinsically interpretative), there is still a strong case for keeping these processes separate (Francis & Village, 2008). For this reason, Jung's notion of type has proved to be a useful framework within which to analyse biblical interpretation in relation to psychology.

The model of psychological type first suggested by Carl Jung (Jung, 1921) and developed by others has proved a fertile way of predicting a wide range of religious preferences and expressions (Francis, 2001, 2005). The model seeks to describe various modes of psychological functioning and how this functioning results in different personalities. In its current form, as developed by Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers (Myers, 2006; Myers & Myers, 1980), the model includes two orientations, two perceiving functions, two judging functions, and two attitudes toward the outer world.

The two orientations are concerned with where individuals prefer to function psychologically. Extraverts (E) are orientated toward the outer world, and much of their psychological functioning is done by interaction with others, which they find stimulating and energizing. They are usually open, sociable people who enjoy having many friends. Introverts (I) are orientated toward their inner world, and much of their psychological functioning is done in periods of solitude, silence, and contemplation, which they find stimulating and energizing. They may prefer to have a small circle of intimate friends rather than many acquaintances.

The two perceiving functions are concerned with the ways in which people gather and process information. Sensing types (S) prefer to process the realities of a situation as perceived by their senses, attending to specific details rather than to the wider picture. Their interests lie mainly with practical issues and they are typically down-to-earth and matter-of-fact. Intuitive types (N), on the other hand, prefer to process the possibilities of a situation as perceived by their imaginations, attending to wider patterns and relationships rather than to specific details. Their interests lie mainly with abstract theories and they are typically imaginative and innovative.

The two judging functions are concerned with the ways in which people make decisions and judgments. Thinking types (T) prefer to process information objectively, attending to logic and principles rather than to relationships and personal values. They value integrity and justice, and they are typically truthful and fair, even at the expense of harmony. Feeling types (F) prefer to process information subjectively, attending to their personal values and relationships rather than to abstract principles. They value compassion and mercy, and they are typically tactful and empathetic, even at the expense of fairness and consistency.

The two attitudes toward the outer world indicate which of the two sets of functions (that is, Perceiving S/N, or Judging T/F) is preferred in dealings with the outer world. Judging types (J) actively judge external stimuli rather than passively perceive them, so they tend to order, rationalize, and structure their outer world. They enjoy routine and established patterns, preferring to reach goals by following schedules and using lists, timetables, or diaries. Perceiving types (P) passively perceive external stimuli rather than actively judging them, so they tend to avoid imposing order on the outer world. They enjoy a flexible, open-ended approach to life that values change and spontaneity, preferring to attend to the moment rather than to plan too far into the future.

Psychological type and biblical interpretation

The theory linking psychological type and interpretation is based on the idea that preferred ways of psychological functioning might shape the way that readers attend to different aspects of texts. The most likely psychological functions are those concerned with the perceiving and judging processes, which relate to the way that information is gathered and evaluated. The theory, first put forward by Francis (1997) and later elaborated as the SIFT method of preaching (Francis, 2003; Francis &

Village, 2008), predicts what kind of interpretations might appeal to those who prefer sensing, intuition, feeling or thinking. The acronym ‘SIFT’ refers to the four psychological functions of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling and Thinking, and the method is for preachers to exposit passages in ways that are designed to appeal to these four different functions. Using this approach, a sermon can explore a text in a manner that means it is likely to resonate at some point with the various psychological type preferences displayed among people in the audience.

Preferred sensors, it is argued, will value interpretations that highlight the details in the text, especially those that draw on sensory information. They will be drawn to factual details and may take a fairly literal approach. Interpretations that begin with a repeat of the text and draw attention to minor details will appeal to sensing types, who will be reluctant to speculate too widely on ‘what else’ the text might mean. For the sensor, interpreting a text may be largely about attending to what is actually there.

Preferred intuitives, it is argued, will value interpretations that fire the imagination and raise new possibilities and challenges. They will be drawn to brainstorming links which may not always be obvious but which draw parallels with analogous ideas and concepts. Interpretations that raise wider questions and that look for overarching or underlying concepts will appeal to intuitive types, who may find the plain or literal sense rather uninteresting. For the intuitive, interpreting a text may be largely about using the text as a springboard to imaginative ideas.

Preferred feelers, it is argued, will value interpretations that stress values and relationships. They will be drawn to empathizing with the characters in a narrative, and will want to understand their thoughts, motives and emotions. Interpretations that try to understand what it was like to be there will appeal to feeling types, who may be

less interested in the abstract theological ideas that might be drawn from the text. For the feeling type, interpreting a text may largely be about applying the human dimensions to present day issues of compassion, harmony and trust.

Preferred thinkers, it is argued, will value interpretations that highlight ideas, concepts and abstract principles. They will be drawn to analysing the ideas in a text and the particular truth-claims that it makes. Interpretations that apply rationality and logic to highlight theological claims in a text will appeal to thinking types, who may be less interested in trying to understand the characters described by the text. For the thinking type, interpreting a text may largely be about seeing what the text means in terms evidence, moral principles or theology.

These different ways of interpreting a text are not mutually exclusive, and indeed the theory of psychological type suggests that individuals may initially use the perceiving functions to engage with a text, and then the judging functions to decide what it means (Francis & Village, 2008). This means that to test these ideas it is necessary to examine separately preference for sensing versus intuitive interpretations and preferences for feeling versus thinking interpretations. If psychological type does influence interpretation then preference for interpretations that are designed to appeal to particular types should show the following relationships:

1. Preferred sensors should show a preference for sensing rather than intuitive interpretations (and vice versa for preferred intuitives). There should be no correlations between preferences for feeling or thinking interpretations and psychological preference for sensing or intuition.
2. Preferred feelers should show a preference for feeling rather than thinking interpretations (and vice versa for preferred thinkers). There should be no

correlations between preferences for sensing or intuitive interpretations and psychological preference for thinking or feeling.

These ideas have previously been examined in a study of 404 lay Anglicans from the Church of England (Village, 2007; Village & Francis, 2005). Respondents were asked to read a healing story from the gospel of Mark, and then given five pairs of interpretations that were either sensing or intuitive and five pairs that were either feeling or thinking. Psychological type was assessed using the Keirsey Temperament Sorter, KTS, (Keirsey, 1998; Keirsey & Bates, 1978), which was used to produce continuous scores for sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking. The results showed that there were significant correlations between preference for interpretative items and psychological type scores in both the perceiving and judging processes. People with high sensing scores (and therefore low intuition scores) were more likely to prefer sensing interpretations to intuitives ones, and vice versa. People with high feeling scores (and therefore low thinking scores) were more likely to prefer feeling interpretations to thinking ones, and vice versa. This study was the first to provide convincing evidence that people may prefer interpretations of Scripture that reflect their preferred psychological type, as predicted by the SIFT theory.

The sample consisted of lay people, the majority of whom had little or no theological education, and the question remains as to whether these findings could be repeated among a more theologically and biblically literate sample of people interpreting in a church context. Education has a strong influence on a number of aspects of interpretation among lay people (Village, 2007), and in the study reported above there was some evidence that theological education might affect the degree to which certain psychological type preferences influence interpretative preferences.

Among 320 lay Anglicans with no theological education at university level, there were significant positive correlations between the choice of items and psychological type in the perceiving ($r = .18, p < .01$) and judging ($r = .20, p < .001$) processes. However, among 73 lay people who *did* have theological education at university level, although there was a significant positive correlation in the perceiving process ($r = .38, p < .01$), there was none in the judging process ($r = .02, NS$) (previously unpublished analysis). The sample of theologically educated lay people was relatively small, but the finding suggests that when it comes to evaluating interpretations (a task associated with the judging process), theological education might override more reflexive interpretative choices based on psychological type preferences. The aim of this study is to test this idea on a large sample of recently ordained Anglicans who were theologically educated to at least university diploma level. If theological education does have the effect predicted from study of lay people, then hypothesis 2 (preferred feelers should show a preference for feeling rather than thinking interpretations, and vice versa for preferred thinkers) should not be upheld among Anglican clergy.

Method

Sample

Questionnaires were posted to all 2190 Anglican clergy ordained between 2004 and 2007 in the United Kingdom, mostly from the Church of England, and 1061 (48%) were returned. Not all the questionnaires contained the section testing type and interpretation, and this study is based on replies from 718 clergy (364 men and 354 women) who gave valid replies to all items used in this analysis. There were no statistically significant differences in mean age, mean bible score (see below) or sex ratio between the 718 clergy in the current sample and the 349 clergy who were

excluded because they did not receive the relevant sections of the questionnaire, suggesting that the sub-sample was a reasonable reflection of those who returned questionnaires. Comparison of age and sex ratios of clergy in the main sample with nationally published figures also indicated that respondents were a reasonably representative sample of recently ordained clergy within the Anglican Church in the UK (Village, unpublished MS).

Dependent variables: interpretative preferences

Preferences for interpretation were measured using a series of forced-choice items based on the exorcism story in Mark 9:14-29. The text was from the New Revised Standard Version, but with book, chapter and verse annotations removed. Later in the questionnaire, introductory sentences (usually short sections of the passage) were followed by two sets of paired items, one set relating to sensing versus intuition, and one set relating to feeling versus thinking (Appendix 1). Respondents were asked to choose from each pair the one statement they preferred. The interpretative passages were selected from a wider pool that included those suggested by Village and Francis (2005). The pool was examined by a panel of researchers who all had experience in using psychological type in the study of religion. From this pool, ten sensing-intuition pairs and ten feeling-thinking pairs were selected for inclusion in the questionnaire. Preference in each case was assessed by the number of choices for interpretations of a particular type, so that within in a psychological process (perceiving or judging) scores for each function were complementary and summed to ten.

Predictor variables: psychological type

The predictor variables were psychological preferences within each of the four dimensions as measured by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005).

These scales have been used increasingly in studies of type and religion, and show good psychometric properties that correlate well with other measures of type such as the Keirsey Temperament Sorter and the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory. The Francis scales consist of 40 forced-choice items with ten related to each of the four dimensions (E/I, S/N, F/T and J/P) of the psychological type model. Items were presented in pairs and respondents were asked to select the one in each pair that was closest to their preference. Selecting one of a pair scored one for the function or attitude it represented, while the unselected function or attitude scored zero. Choices were summed to give a score for each function, and preferences assigned according to which of the pair scored highest. Reliabilities for the scales in this study using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) were: E/I = .85, S/N = .77, F/T = .71, J/P = .80.

An earlier analysis of type and interpretation (Village & Francis, 2005) used function scores for sensing, intuition, feeling or thinking as predictor variables rather than preferences between sensing and intuition or between feeling and thinking. Using scores on the present dataset gave similar results to using binary preferences, but the categorical measure was preferred here because plots of interpretative choices against relevant function scores suggested a bimodal response rather than a continuous linear response.

Controls: sex and bible score

Sex was used as a control variable because of the widely reported difference between men and women in the judging process, where women are more likely to prefer feeling over thinking compared with men (Kendall, 1998; Myers, 2006).

Psychological type has also been shown to be related to a range of religious variables, some of which might in turn be related to interpretative choices. The most likely of these concerns the observation that religious conservatism tends to be associated with

preference for sensing rather than intuition (Francis & Ross, 1997; Ross, 1992; Ross, Francis & Craig, 2005; Ross, Weiss & Jackson, 1996; Village, Francis & Craig, 2009). Conservatism in biblical terms tends toward literalism (Village, 2007), and conservatives might be attracted to the more down-to-earth interpretations associated with sensing and wary of the more speculative interpretations associated with a preference for intuition. Another possible indirect link between type and interpretative preference may be in the judging process, and especially the thinking function. Conservative thinking-types may be drawn to the rational analysis of texts and the way that they may uphold theological and moral principles. On the other hand, a preference for thinking may also engender scepticism about texts and a rejection of literalism that is sometimes associated with liberalism.

To ensure that choices for interpretations were not wholly driven by prior theological convictions it was necessary to control for biblical liberalism or conservatism. The bible scale (Village, 2005a, 2007) is a 12-item scale measuring liberal versus conservative belief about the bible. It was included in the questionnaire, and in this sample showed a similar high internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) to that reported elsewhere. Controlling for bible belief helped to ensure that any correlations between type and preferred interpretations were not simply about conservative clergy choosing conservative interpretations and liberal clergy choosing liberal ones.

Analysis

Data were analysed using the multiple regression procedure in SPSS 17.0 (SPSS, 2008), with separate analyses for interpretative choices in the perceiving and in the judging processes. In each process, the function scores for interpretative preferences were mirror images of one another, so it was necessary to use only one as the

dependent variable, in this case either the number of intuitive or the number of feeling choices. Psychological type preferences were entered as binary categorical variables representing the four dimensions of orientation (1 = extraversion, 2 = introversion), perceiving (1 = sensing, 2 = intuition), judging (1 = thinking, 2 = feeling) and attitude toward the outer world (1 = judging, 2 = perceiving). Control variables were sex (1 = male, 2 = female) and bible score (lowest possible score, 12 = most liberal, highest possible score, 60 = most conservative), the latter included as a scalar covariate.

Results

Psychological type

The 718 clergy in this sample showed an overall preference for introversion over extraversion (59% I versus 41% E, $\chi^2 = 22.8$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), feeling over thinking (58% F versus 42% E, $\chi^2 = 18.7$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$) and judging over perceiving (86% J versus 14% P, $\chi^2 = 373.7$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), but no preference between sensing and intuition (51% S versus 49% N, $\chi^2 = 0.2$, $df = 1$, NS). The only difference between the sexes was the much stronger preference for feeling over thinking among women compared with men (Table 1).

Interpretative choices

Selection of individual items is shown in Appendix 1. The number of choices in each of the four interpretative categories (sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking) was approximately normally distributed and ranged from zero to ten. Distributions for each function pair were mirror images, hence their identical standard deviations (Table 2). Overall, the mean number of choices for sensing interpretations was just under twice that for intuitive interpretations, and the same was true for feeling interpretations compared with thinking interpretations.

Associations among variables

The correlations in Table 3 suggest that, as expected, women were more likely to prefer feeling to thinking than were men, and this might partly explain the greater number of feeling interpretations chosen by women. The negative correlation of sex with biblical conservatism score suggests that women in this sample were generally less biblically conservative than were men. Biblical conservatism was negatively correlated with introversion, with intuition and with feeling, suggesting that it may have been most prevalent among clergy who preferred extraversion, sensing and thinking. Biblical conservatism was also strongly negatively correlated with both the number of feeling and the number of intuitive interpretative choices, confirming that biblical conservatism needed to be controlled for when examining links between psychological type and biblical interpretation.

Psychological type and interpretative choices

The multiple regression analyses provided support both the main hypotheses (Table 4). There were no correlations between interpretative choices and preferences in either psychological orientation (extraversion or introversion) or attitude toward the outer world (judging or perceiving). After allowing for sex and bible beliefs, the number of intuitive (versus sensing) interpretative items chosen was positively correlated with a psychological preference for intuition over sensing, but not correlated with preference in the judging process. Similarly, the number of feeling (versus thinking) interpretative items chosen was positively correlated with a psychological preference for feeling over thinking, but not correlated with preference in the perceiving process. The effect of adding the psychological type variables significantly improved the models, both for intuitive interpretative choices (change in $R^2 = .02$, $F(4, 711) = 4.04$, $p < .01$) and for feeling interpretative choices (change in $R^2 = .02$, $F(4, 711) = 4.68$,

$p < .01$). The effect was relatively small, however, and biblical conservatism remained a strong predictor of interpretative choices in both cases.

Discussion

These results are roughly in line with previous studies on Anglican clergy that have shown higher preferences for introversion, intuition, feeling and judging compared with the population at large (Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley & Slater, 2007; Francis, Robbins, Duncan, Whinney & Ross, Unpublished MS; Francis, Robbins & Whinney, Unpublished MS). This suggests that the clergy in this sample were fairly typical of UK Anglican clergy in terms of their psychological profiles. Compared with congregations or the population at large, clergy of both sexes showed a greater preference for intuition, and among men there was a greater preference for feeling.

Types of interpretations

These results are in line with a previous study of Anglican lay people in the Church of England, which used a different measure of psychological type and a slightly different instrument to measure interpretative preferences (Village & Francis, 2005). In that study and this, psychological type remained a significant predictor of interpretative choices after allowing for the link between biblical conservatism and interpretation. The correlations were present in the predicted directions and only in the predicted processes, so that the effect of psychological type seemed to be specific to particular sorts of interpretation.

When faced with the story of the boy who was apparently exorcised of an evil spirit by Jesus after the disciples had failed to do so, sensors were more likely than intuitives to prefer interpretative statements such as:

“The disciples are brought down to earth by the reality of life.”

“I can picture the boy writhing on the ground, dust and foam sticking to his mouth.”

“Jesus demonstrates that real faith can bring tangible results.”

Intuitives, on the other hand, were more likely than sensors to prefer interpretative statements such as:

“There is a wider and deeper battle being fought here.”

“Is this a metaphor of evil doing its worst when confronted with the ultimate good?”

“The boy comes back to life: perhaps a kind of resurrection?”

Both these types of response are legitimate ways to engage with the test passage, but they are indicative of different sorts of interpretations. Sensing interpretations are likely to stay with the details of the passage and stress the tangible, practical lessons that could be learnt from the passage. Intuitive interpretations seem to be less tied to the text and to more easily draw imaginative or general lessons from the passage.

A similar pattern was apparent in the judging process when readers were faced with the same biblical narrative. In this case, feeling types were more likely than thinking types to prefer interpretative statements such as:

“Jesus understands our highs and lows because he felt them himself.”

“I feel sorry for the boy, who must have wondered what was happening.”

“Jesus, feeling his disciples’ disappointment, helps them to cope with their failure.”

Thinking types, on the other hand, were more likely than feeling types to prefer interpretative statements such as:

“We would do better to follow faith and fact rather than feelings”,

“This is evidence that the boy is caught up in a battle of good and evil forces.”

“Jesus seems to recognise different kinds of spirits, some dealt with only by prayer.”

Again, these responses are indicative of different sorts of interpretations. Feeling interpretations focus on people in the narrative, especially on how they react to events

and how their actions are shaped by mutual understanding or concern. Thinking interpretations pay attention to the evidence and what might be concluded from it.

In both cases, the effect of psychological type was statistically significant, but relatively small. There are two main reasons why this might be so. First, the method of measuring interpretative preference was necessarily fairly crude in a study of this nature, and correlations are always likely to be weak given the difficulty in assuring that short items are linked to particular functions and that scales based on them are internally reliable. Second, type preferences are clearly going to be one among many factors that will shape interpretative preferences. Type preferences may work at an unconscious level, and many interpretative choices will also be affected by specific theological or intellectual convictions. If that is the case, then detecting any statistically significant influence of psychological type may indicate that it is a pervasive influence on the way that people interpret biblical texts. This influence should not be overplayed, but it is detectable and seems to be a genuine association.

Interpretation, bible belief and religious conservatism

Although clergy as whole tended to prefer sensing to intuitive interpretations, biblical conservatives showed a stronger preference for such interpretations than did biblical liberals. Similarly, although clergy as a whole showed a strong preference for feeling interpretations, the preference was less evident among biblical conservatives than among biblical liberals. Biblical liberalism versus conservatism remained a powerful predictor of interpretative choices after allowing for psychological type preferences. This highlights the fact that choice of interpretations is not simply about the psychological preferences, but also about more cognitive aspects related to what individuals believe about the bible.

The tendency of sensing interpretations to stay more closely with the passage may explain why they also seem to appeal more often to biblical conservatives than to biblical liberals. This relationship appears to be independent of the fact that type preference in the perceiving process might also be related to general religious conservatism or liberalism (Francis & Ross, 1997). The correlation between biblical conservatism and preference for thinking types of interpretations perhaps stems from the conservative interest in rational deduction of theology from the bible, and the underlying notion that if the bible is true then it must be rationally true and open to careful interrogation of the evidence. Most clergy were preferred feelers, especially women, and this is evident in the high number of feeling choices among women, even after allowing for type preference. Feeling-type clergy may prefer to focus on interpretations of the bible that promote mutual understanding and harmony, rather than those that may lead to potentially divisive or exclusive interpretations of theological concepts.

Interpretation among the theologically educated

This study of clergy shows that these different interpretative preferences seem to be present not only among lay people but also among those who have some expertise in biblical and theological study. Anglican clergy in the UK today are normally required to be trained to at least the equivalent of an undergraduate diploma, and 84% of the clergy in this sample were graduates or postgraduates. Given that this sample was, almost by definition, theologically educated, it was not possible to test for the effect of education on interpretative choices (there were no statistically significant differences between clergy who had degrees and those who did not). In the study of lay people reported by Village and Francis (2005), those with theological education showed no relationship between interpretative choices in the judging process and

psychological type preference. This suggested that judging interpretations may be more influenced by theological considerations than psychological preferences. However, the fact that some association was evident in this study of clergy suggests that even people with a background academic study of the bible may nonetheless show some effect of psychological type preference on interpretation, albeit small.

The various interpretative approaches identified in this sample are partly about style rather than substance, but it is not difficult to see how scholars consistently applying them may develop different sorts of engagement with scripture.

Sensing engagement will tend to affirm the text in its complexity and detail, and may help readers to notice small details that others would miss. The tendency to ‘stay with the text’ does not necessarily mean a literal interpretation, because the skills of the senser may be valuable to those who examine texts for clues of their historical origin or literary structure. The ability to attend to the sensory information in texts may foster interpretations that highlight the rich meanings associated with words and the ways in which they work together to produce complex patterns of meaning.

Intuitive engagement tends to sit more lightly on the details of the text, and might sometimes need to gloss over these details in order to justify interpretations that seem unwarranted on close inspection. On the other hand, the ability to handle scripture by analogy, allegory and metaphor may foster access to some valuable interpretative traditions that have stressed the ‘fuller’ meaning of scripture. The intuitive ability to see underlying ideas expressed in very different ways might foster canonical readings that allow Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament to witness to continuing truths.

Feeling engagement seeks understanding of authors or characters in the text and might encourage the building of bridges between the horizons of author, text and reader. This sort of ability may help readers to identify more closely with the authors of texts, an ability that is linked to the notion of ‘psychological divination’ that is often attributed to the hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher (Thiselton, 1992: 216-228). This sort of reading might sometimes produce unwarranted harmonization of original and current contexts, but its strength is the ability to recognize the commonality of values expressed in scripture and owned by contemporary reading communities. Stephen Fowl’s notion of ‘underdetermined interpretation’ (Fowl, 1998) would seem to be a method of theological interpretation that draws heavily on the skills of feeling types within the reading community. He argues for less stress on the meaning that might be inherent in texts, and a closer focus of the relationships, values and ethics of interpreting communities.

Thinking engagement is, perhaps, more obviously connected to the traditional skills required for scholarly engagement with scripture. The ability to analyse logically, discern theological principles and extract meaningful data from the biblical text has long been the hallmark of biblical and theological study, and these ways of evaluation are associated with the thinking function. Thinking types might also have a crucial role in enabling scholars to resist the temptation to self indulgence in their interpretative strategies. In a postmodern environment, with its strong stress on personal contexts and individuality, the thinking ability to identify and speak of rational and logical interpretations may cut through some of the more absurd interpretations that inevitably ride the waves of interpretative fashion.

Conclusion

Two studies have now demonstrated empirically the links between psychological type and interpretation of the bible. In both cases this has required the rather reductionist technique of creating particular interpretative statements that are designed to appeal to particular psychological type preferences. This was necessary to demonstrate in quantitative terms that type may indeed be a factor in shaping interpretation. The evidence suggests that it is, and that this is not simply an indirect effect of type on bible belief, but the consequence of more direct effects of psychological functioning on how texts are perceived and evaluated. A next step might be to do more qualitative analyses that allow ordinary readers to create their own interpretations, which can then be examined against the sort of type-based interpretation suggested in this paper. This may also allow study of type and interpretation in a wider range of biblical texts than has hitherto been possible.

Table 1 Psychological type preferences for men and women

	Men	Women		
	364	354		
	%	%	χ^2	<i>P</i>
E	40.9	41.2		
I	59.1	58.8	0.02	.933
S	54.1	47.5		
N	45.9	52.5	3.19	.074
F	51.1	65.3		
T	48.9	34.7	14.77	< .001
J	87.6	84.5		
P	12.4	15.5	1.51	.219

Note. Differences between sexes tested by chi-squared with $df = 2$.

Table 2 Mean number of choices of interpretations matched to the four psychological functions

Process	Function	Mean number of choices	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Perceiving	Sensing	6.1	1.6	1	10
	Intuition	3.9	1.6	0	9
Judging	Feeling	6.1	1.7	2	10
	Thinking	3.9	1.7	0	8

Note. In each process there were ten forced-choice item pairs. N = 718.

Table 3 Correlation matrix for dependent and independent variables

	FC	NC	P	F	N	I	BC
Sex	.16***	.01	.05	.14***	.07	.00	-.18***
Biblical conservatism (BC)	-.29***	-.34***	-.06	-.10**	-.18***	-.07*	
Introversion (I)	.05	-.01	-.15***	-.06	-.06		
Intuition (N)	.06	.19***	.24***	.01			
Feeling (F)	.17***	.06	.16***				
Perceiving (P)	.10**	.06					
Intuitive choices (NC)	.14***						
Feeling choices (FC)							

Table 4 Multiple regression analyses of number of intuitive and number of feeling interpretative choices against control and predictor variables

	Intuitive interpretative choices	Feeling interpretative choices
Model 1 (controls only)	β	β
Sex (Female)	-.05	.12**
Biblical conservatism	-.35***	-.27***
R^2 :	.12	.10
Model 2 (controls and predictors)	β	β
Sex (Female)	-.06	.10**
Biblical conservatism	-.33***	-.25***
Orientation (Introversion)	-.03	.05
Perceiving (Intuition)	.13***	-.01
Judging (Feeling)	.03	.12**
Attitude (Perceiving)	.00	.07
R^2 :	.14	.12

Note. Sex and psychological type are measured with binary variables; in each case the highest labelled category is shown in parentheses. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

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Appendix 1 Interpretative items based on Mark 9:14-29

Items	Type	%
<i>This story comes after the transfiguration</i>		
The disciples are brought down to earth by the reality of life	S	93
'Mountaintop' imaginings are more important than life's mundane frustrations	N	7
Jesus understands our highs and lows because he felt them himself	F	88
We would do better to follow faith and fact rather than feelings	T	12
<i>Someone from the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak ... and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.'</i>		
The disciples' failure is countered by Jesus' success	S	20
The disciples' failure symbolizes the failure that all disciples sometimes encounter	N	80
I feel the disciples' shame that they could not meet the father's cry for help	F	34
This is evidence that the disciples were already trying to heal the sick	T	66
<i>When the spirit saw [Jesus] immediately it convulsed the boy...</i>		
The sight of Jesus evokes a powerful reaction from the evil spirit	S	37
There is a wider and deeper battle being fought here	N	63
I feel sorry for the boy, who must have wondered what was happening.	F	45
This is evidence that the boy is caught up in a battle of good and evil forces	T	55
<i>... and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth</i>		
I can picture the boy writhing on the ground, dust and foam sticking to his face	S	75
Is this a metaphor of evil doing its worst when confronted with the ultimate good?	N	25
Here is a child frightened and confused who needs to be made whole	F	55
The evidence suggests that the boy had epilepsy	T	45
<i>[The father] said, 'From childhood, it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' Jesus said to him, 'If you are able! –All things can be done for the one who believes.'</i>		
Jesus demonstrates that real faith can achieve tangible results	S	68
Who knows what this could mean for us if we believe?	N	32
Jesus reassures the anxious father that his son really can be helped	F	73
Jesus demonstrates the logical link between faith and healing	T	27

<hr/> <i>Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'</i>		
'I believe; help my unbelief!' is the cry of a confused man	S	6
Perhaps religious faith is always a mixture of belief and doubt	N	94
I can feel the anguish of a father who does not want his lack of faith to harm his son	F	79
It is unfair to blame the father for doubting when the disciples had just failed to heal his son	T	21
<hr/> <i>Jesus... rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, '... I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!'</i>		
With simple authority, Jesus casts out the deaf and mute spirit	S	84
What exactly was wrong with this boy?	N	16
Jesus uses his anger to drive out the spirit and heal the child	F	26
Jesus apparently believed that spirits might return after being exorcised	T	74
<hr/> <i>After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand</i>		
Jesus demonstrates his power to exorcise demons and heal the oppressed	S	78
The boy comes back to life: perhaps a kind of resurrection?	N	22
I can understand why the onlookers would feel that the boy was dead	F	88
There is no direct evidence to show how the onlookers reacted to these events	T	12
<hr/> <i>When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' Jesus said to them, 'This kind can come out only through prayer.'</i>		
The disciples learnt about prayer by observing Jesus and listening to what he said	S	80
The disciples were inspired to pray with faith: the pathway to future success	N	20
Jesus, feeling his disciples' disappointment, helps them to cope with their failure	F	48
Jesus seems to recognise different kinds of spirits, some dealt with only by prayer	T	52
<hr/> <i>On the passage as a whole:</i>		
Jesus teaches about faith and prayer by dealing with the problem in a straightforward way	S	71
Is this an indication that we too can heal such people through faith and prayer?	N	29
This passage encourages us to pray with faith when we feel overwhelmed by doubt	F	70
The passage demonstrates that faithful prayer is a rational response to evil	T	30

Note. In each case respondents were asked to choose between the S or N interpretation and between the F or T interpretation. The presentation of items in S/N or F/T pairs was randomized in the questionnaire. % = percentage of 718 clergy that chose that item.